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TOPKINS, ROBERT MORTON. The Western Carolinian as a Political Organ: 1820-1832. (1973)
Directed by: Dr. Allen W. Trelease. Pp. 77.

It was the purpose of this study to investigate the early history of the Western Carolinian, a weekly newspaper published at Salisbury, North Carolina, from 1820 to 1844. It was hypothesized that the paper's loss of popular support after nearly a decade of relative success stemmed almost exclusively from political considerations. It was also hypothesized that the paper achieved its notoriety during the time its popularity began to wane.

With minor exceptions, every issue of the Western Carolinian published between 1820 and 1833 was available on microfilm. The editorial pages of these issues were studied in detail to provide insights into the position of the paper in regard to the many political issues of the time. In addition, the published letters of contemporaries residing in or near Salisbury were surveyed in order to provide insights into the attitudes and opinions of the journal's readership.

The available data yielded evidence supporting the hypothesis that the Western Carolinian fell out of favor with a sizeable portion of its readership because its management used the paper to espouse and defend a highly unpopular

4

political cause. It also supported the contention that the paper's management failed to capitalize on many favorable opportunities for journalistic success by reason of its own political miscalculations.

THE WESTERN CAROLINIAN AS A

POLITICAL ORGAN

1829-1833

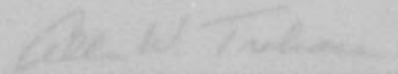
by

Robert Norton Topkins

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
the University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Greensboro
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APPROVAL PAGE

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I wish to thank my advisor, Dr. Allen W. Trelease,
for his personal encouragement and professional assistance
in the preparation of this thesis. I am grateful also to
my wife, Judith Price Topakas, for her steady support in
this academic endeavor.

This thesis has been approved by the following committee
of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of
North Carolina at Greensboro.

Thesis Adviser

Allen W. Trelease

Examination
Committee Members

Allen W. Trelease

Blacknell P. Robinson

RTK

Date of Examination

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out every section of the state. Only one paper, the Raleigh Register, managed to maintain a continual existence from the opening of the nineteenth century until the end of the ante-bellum period.¹

One important factor in making newspaper publishing a "precarious profession" was the general illiteracy and ignorance of the population. Joseph Caldwell, first president of the University of North Carolina, expressed the belief in 1830 that a widely-felt indifference to education in the state had resulted in "vast numbers" of persons having spent much of their lives without it.² As late as 1840, one-third of the state's adult whites were

CHAPTER I

NEW VOICE IN THE WEST

Ante-bellum North Carolina was not an ideal environment for the proprietor of a newspaper. From the beginning of the nineteenth century it was frequently asserted that North Carolina's citizens simply were not interested in a "native literature"; and, although this condition was alleviated somewhat by the 1850's, the entire period witnessed the death of many newspapers throughout every section of the state. Only one paper, the Raleigh Register, managed to maintain a continual existence from the opening of the nineteenth century until the end of the ante-bellum period.¹

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illiterate.³ In a very real sense, ante-bellum North Carolina newspapers--particularly during the first twenty years of the nineteenth century--could not reasonably depend upon the support of a genuine "reading public."

Many journals of the era reflected this condition. A wide array of advertisements, jokes, public announcements, essays on morality, commodity prices, offers of reward for the return of runaway slaves, and much miscellaneous "intelligence" copied from northern newspapers tardily received through the mails often substituted for offerings of a legitimately newsworthy nature. More important, nearly every paper tended to cater to the less discerning segment of its potential readership by focusing its attention almost exclusively on national politics, often to the virtual exclusion of timely local issues. Most papers, in fact, existed primarily as political organs. "Their chief object was to serve the interests of the party and to devote whatever space was left to matters of general interest."⁴ The following commentary on the national press of the era well portrays the conditions prevalent in North Carolina during this period:

A raw young nation which had no independent literature, no drama, no art, no music, intent upon

conquering a living from the wild forest . . . -- how much could this nation expect beyond politics; beyond underbred personalities, ill-tempered campaign harangues, and a none-too-intelligent discussion of fiscal topics? Certainly most journals gave it nothing better.⁵

The growth of North Carolina's press in this era provides additional insights into the general lack of interest in newspapers on the part of the public. Between 1810 and 1823, the number of papers published in the state increased only from ten to twelve; however, by 1830 the state could boast of twenty-one existing papers.⁶ Between 1815 and 1835 there were never more than thirty papers published in the state. Most of these journals were weeklies, but there were at least two semi-weeklies which lasted for a time.⁷ More important to this study is the fact that as late as 1812 not a single paper was published west of Raleigh,⁸ and that by mid-1820 only two papers originated in the so-called "West," the Milton Gazette (Caswell County) and the Hillsborough Recorder (Orange County), neither of which was especially "western," even by 1820 standards. This is a key year for this study, not only because it witnessed the establishment of the journal under examination, but because it marked the point of departure for a new style of journalistic activity throughout North Carolina:

With the year 1820 a new epoch opens. There was profound and increasing discontent with the existing political organization, national and state. Discontent of the western counties with the system of representation was also intense. Here lay the opportunity for the foundation of new papers. Editorials and state affairs became more prominent. The early editors were chary in regard to state news, inclinations toward violent language were restrained, dignity and decorum characterized their editorial columns. But with the new period a new type of editorial appeared. It burned with conviction, broke the bounds of sedate constraint, and faced any situation uncompromisingly. The new note was struck by the Western Carolinian.⁹

The Western Carolinian was founded at Salisbury on June 13, 1820, by James Krider and Lemuel Bingham. It is important to note the geographic and demographic status of Salisbury at this time in order fully to appreciate the timeliness of the journal's establishment. To begin with, Salisbury and Old Rowan County (including present-day Rowan, Davidson and Davie Counties) were truly "western" in geographic terms, with only the sparsely-settled mountains to the west. Nevertheless, the Census of 1820 reveals that of a total white population of 428,948 in the state, the "West" contained 244,858 or 57.08 per cent. Old Rowan County alone contained 20,955 whites, or 4.89 per cent of the state's total white population.¹⁰ With only two newspapers existing west of Raleigh at this time, the opportunity

for the foundation of new papers did indeed exist.

Of James Krider, who remained connected with the Western Carolinian for only ten months, little is known. He apparently departed the field of journalism altogether and was replaced by Philo White of New York, who in partnership with Lemuel Bingham operated and edited the paper under the firm name of Bingham and White until May, 1823. Bingham thereupon dissolved his connection with the paper, served as publisher of the Fayetteville Observer for a time, and in 1824 established the Catawba Journal at Charlotte. In 1828 he re-established this paper in Salisbury as the Yadkin and Catawba Journal and remained there as owner or co-owner until November, 1833. Under Bingham, the Yadkin and Catawba Journal engaged in brisk combat with the Western Carolinian, particularly with the latter's support of nullification in the early 1830's.¹¹ (For a discussion of Philo White's management of the Western Carolinian after Bingham's departure in 1823, see infra, pp. 26-28.)

In the paper's inaugural issue, Krider and Bingham declared that

There is one subject . . . upon which we must repeat some of the sentiments contained in our prospectus. We mean the necessity of a

Convention of the free people of North Carolina.
 To the accomplishment of this great object we
 shall devote no inconsiderable portion of our
 columns. The political grievances of the Wes-
 tern people of North Carolina are becoming too
 oppressive quietly to endure any longer. Our
State Government is a complete aristocracy--
the few govern the many!

The "political grievances" recognized by the editors were harsh realities of life for the citizens of the state's western counties. Under the state constitution of 1776 the "common man" was virtually barred from direct participation in the political process." "Any taxpayer could vote for members of the House of Commons, but only owners of at least fifty acres of land could vote for State Senators. The Governor, other State officials, and United States Senators were all elected by the General Assembly."¹² Ownership of real property was a requirement for holding the office of governor, state senator and member of the House of Commons. The principal criticism of the 1776 Constitution, however, was against the inequitable system of "equal county" representation in the General Assembly. Under this system, each county, regardless of population, wealth or size, was entitled to one senator and to two representatives in the House of Commons. The East, possessing a greater number of counties, controlled both

houses of the legislature before 1835, even though the population of the West consistently grew at a more rapid rate throughout the period, and even surpassed that of the East by 1830. This condition enabled twelve small counties in the East, for example, to send thirty-six members to the 1820 assembly, while Rowan and Orange, two western counties with a total population approximately equal to the twelve eastern counties, were permitted a representation of only six.¹³ Many influential citizens of the West were aware that the state constitution was itself an obstacle to many of the reforms being sought in the General Assembly by that section's inequitable number of legislators. It is a testament to the Western Carolinian's usefulness that a call for constitutional reform appeared in its very first number. During the first ten years of the paper's existence it never failed to champion this cause, although the reform movement failed to secure tangible results until 1835.

The journal's advocacy of a constitutional convention often took the form of an appeal to the politically inactive westerners to rid themselves of "that spirit of procrastination, which . . . inclines them to trudge patiently along under the yoke, justifying themselves with the convenient

excuse, that 'the time has not yet come.'"¹⁴ The editorial columns reflected the opinion that "if the aristocratic features of our constitution are effaced, if our rights are restored and our grievances redressed, these events must be brought about by the West alone."¹⁵ Throughout the period before 1835, the paper realistically assessed the problem as having no possible solution through legislative means and instead urged the westerners to "look to another source for justice.....to the source of all political power, the People themselves!"¹⁶

The paper allotted prominent coverage in nearly every weekly issue between March 19 and June 25, 1822, to the debate in the North Carolina House of Commons on Charles Fisher's¹⁷ resolutions to call a constitutional convention, in order that "the public will now have a full and fair view of the arguments which the East use to justify them in opposing the wishes of the people"¹⁸ When in December, 1822, the legislature elected John Branch of Halifax County over General Montford Stokes of Wilkes County to serve as United States Senator, the Western Carolinian lamented the fact that the East was now represented by both senators¹⁹ and that Stokes, "a venerable revolutionary patriot" and "faithful and long tried servant"

had been rejected "simply . . . because he was a western, and his opponent an eastern man."²⁰

The groundswell in the West for a constitutional convention reached its first peak in November, 1823, when forty-seven delegates were sent to Raleigh from twenty-four western counties to meet in an extralegal convention in order to make recommendations to the legislature for a legally-sanctioned state convention. Rejection of these recommendations, combined with a spirited new interest in national politics and the impending presidential election of 1824, brought about a temporary lull in the demand for constitutional reform which lasted through the remainder of the 1820's, only to have it reappear with new potency after 1830.²¹

Another cause strongly sanctioned by Bingham and White was education. They gave enthusiastic support for the creation of a "western college" and frequently called for the establishment of primary schools throughout the state. "Among all the objects of legislation," mused the editors, "none presents so many claims to attention as this; among all the objects of internal improvements, none other possesses half the importance that this does."²² Addressing themselves to the members of the General Assembly

which convened in November, 1822, the editors asserted that only one means existed to increase North Carolina's influence in the Union and "make it in some degree proportionate to its mighty, but hidden resources . . . DIFFUSING KNOWLEDGE AMONG THE PEOPLE."²³ To the 1823 General Assembly, the journal directed this timely assessment of a long-ignored problem:

We have a well endowed and very respectable University; but its advantages are too remote from the great mass of the population of the state, to be felt and appreciated by them. The people at large are deplorably deficient in the rudiments of an education. To obviate this, primary schools are wanting. No appropriation which the Legislature could make, would be so little objected to as for the support of common schools.²⁴

Despite the Western Carolinian's early emphasis on state matters--particularly the demand for constitutional reform, a public school system and internal improvements, all of which "forced more and more newspapers to take sides on State issues"²⁵--the journal remained, like nearly all others in the state and nation, concerned primarily with national politics.²⁶ Several factors contributed to this condition. To begin with, the death of the Federalist party by 1816 had left the state without an effective two-party system. More important, a general apathy toward state matters had existed in North Carolina from the outset.

"The only community sense that the mass of the people of the State possessed in this period was a universal desire to be let alone . . . and a common hatred of any movement which might require the raising of taxes."²⁷ A contemporary, residing in the West, expressed the sentiment that "everything both of a political and domestic nature is tinged with Niggardiness. This opinion . . . has been so long by me entertained as to become almost constitutional."²⁸

More important, perhaps, was the general excitement felt throughout the state regarding the issues of the impending presidential campaign of 1824. Until this time, strong factionalism within political parties was not a dominant factor in the state, although a "clear division" between Federalists and Republicans had existed since before 1815. During the ensuing five-year period, however, such lines of distinction became blurred, with several editors not bothering to mention the elections of 1816 or 1820 in their journals.²⁹

The 1824 campaign, however, produced an alignment of most of North Carolina's newspapers into opposing camps. This was especially significant in the political and journalistic history of the state, due in large measure to the resounding blow it dealt the hitherto-unified state

Republican party press.³¹ In addition, the various issues which surfaced during the campaign stimulated further East-West rivalry and infused a new stridency into the state's newspapers. This new spirit prompted William H. Haywood, Jr., prominent Raleigh attorney, to observe, nearly a year before the elections were to be held,

It is humbling to every honest . . . Citizen to read the scandalous production of our newspapers thro: the country whose main object seems to be to detract & defame--what must be the impression produced upon the minds of foreign nation [s]?³¹

In a similar vein, Willie P. Mangum's brother lamented the new journalistic vehemence exhibited during the campaign:

I am entirely ignorant of the passing events in the Councils of the nation, except what little information I have gleaned from one or two papers, which have casually fallen under my observation. This is attributable to the retirement of a country residence & the want of my papers which have not yet been directed to this neighborhood. Perhaps the latter course is not to be regretted, unless the press has cast off the weight of moral corruption, which a few months or rather weeks ago filled its pages & disgraced its character.³²

The Western Carolinian struck an uncharacteristically lofty note when the campaign first made its appearance as a topic for discussion:

The question, Who shall be our next President? is warmly agitated in some . . . papers; and is discussed with a spirit, and, we may say,

violence, which show that, however pure and patriotic the motives of the writers may ostensibly be, they are such as we think no good man can approve of

In selecting a candidate for the Presidency, the inquiry should be, not whether he was from north or south of the Potomac, east or west of the mountains, --but, "Is he honest.....is he capable?"³³

This same genteel voice of reason changed its tune during the heat of political battle, however, and toward the close of the campaign loosed the following shaft against one of its favorite targets, the Milton Gazette:

There is an editorial article in the Milton Gazette . . . the uncourteous personality . . . of which, forbids our noticing it, further than to note down a broad and . . . unwarrantable assertion it contains Now, sometime about the 3d day of November next, the Editor of the Milton Gazette will be made, "like the dog that returns to his vomit," to swallow these words again. As nauseating as the potion may be, down it must go--we know no better remedy for the political vapors.³⁴

That journal frequently incurred the wrath of the Western Carolinian's early editors by aligning itself in opposition to the various reforms demanded by the West. A journalistic vendetta soon ensued, particularly during the presidential campaign of 1824, when the Milton paper strongly endorsed the nominee of the "Eastern Caucus," William H. Crawford of Georgia. The editors of the Western Carolinian seemed to delight in this battle and rarely

missed an opportunity to portray the Milton Gazette as a "semi-Virginia" paper.³⁵

For this study, the election of 1824 has special significance, for it signalled the beginning of the Western Carolinian's "ideological" approach to national issues. Before this time, the journal had conducted itself in a manner much to be expected from a nascent western press, rendering support for the political ideals and aspirations of its western constituents, particularly in the realm of state matters. The presidential campaign of 1824 represents, perhaps, the Western Carolinian's initial "diversion" from its original role as spokesman for the politically under-represented West.

³⁵ Johnson, Anti-Slavery North Carolina, pp. 166-68.
³⁶ Daniel Miles McFarland, "North Carolina Newspapers, Editors and Journalistic Politics, 1815-1835," North Carolina Historical Review, XXX, (July, 1953), 377.

³⁷ John Hill Wheeler, Historical Sketches of North Carolina from 1784 to 1891 (2 vols. in 1; Baltimore: Regional Publishing Company, 1902), p. 113.

³⁸ William E. Boyd, History of North Carolina (5 vols.; Chicago and New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1919), II, 375. In the second number of the Western Carolinian, the editors acknowledged the prevailing view that newspapers were "ill and uninteresting." But expressed the belief that "newspapers never possessed more powerful claims to

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER ONE

¹Guion Griffis Johnson, Ante-Bellum North Carolina (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937), p. 764.

²Joseph Caldwell, Letters on Popular Education addressed to the People of North Carolina (Hillsborough, North Carolina: Dennis Heartt, 1832), p. 3.

³Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, North Carolina: The History of a Southern State (rev. ed.; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), p. 304.

⁴Johnson, Ante-Bellum North Carolina, p. 781.

⁵Allan Nevins, American Press Opinion, Washington to Coolidge: A Documentary History of Editorial Leadership and Criticism, 1785-1927 (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1928), p. 6.

⁶Johnson, Ante-Bellum North Carolina, pp. 766-68.

⁷Daniel Miles McFarland, "North Carolina Newspapers, Editors and Journalistic Politics, 1815-1835," North Carolina Historical Review, XXX, (July, 1953), 377.

⁸John Hill Wheeler, Historical Sketches of North Carolina From 1584 to 1851 (2 vols. in 1; Baltimore: Regional Publishing Company, 1964), p. 113.

⁹William K. Boyd, History of North Carolina (6 vols.; Chicago and New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1919), II 376. In the second number of the Western Carolinian, the editors acknowledged the prevailing view that newspapers were "dull and uninteresting," but expressed the belief that "newspapers never possessed more powerful claims to

support, never were more deserving of public patronage, than at the present time." ("NEWS," in Western Carolinian, June 20, 1820.)

¹⁰U.S., Census Office, Census for 1820, Book I (Washington, D.C.: Gales & Seaton, 1821).

¹¹McFarland, "North Carolina Newspapers," p. 408.

¹²Hugh Talmage Lefler, History of North Carolina (4 vols.; New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1956), I, 338.

¹³Boyd, History of North Carolina, II, 148.

¹⁴"OUR POLITICAL GRIEVANCES," in Western Carolinian, August 8, 1820.

¹⁵"CONVENTION," in Western Carolinian, July 17, 1821.

¹⁶"THE CONVENTION QUESTION," in Western Carolinian, January 1, 1822. At one point the editors urged that the convention question not be brought before the legislature at all, because "there is nothing to be expected from that body, and therefore we see no propriety in bringing it forward." ("THE STATE LEGISLATURE," in Western Carolinian, December 3, 1822.)

¹⁷Fisher was a prominent Rowan County politician whose relationship with the Western Carolinian was far more than casual (see infra, pp. 13-15, 17, 19, 35.)

¹⁸"THE CONVENTION," in Western Carolinian, March 19, 1822.

¹⁹The other senator was Nathaniel Macon of Warren County.

²⁰"SENATORIAL ELECTION," in Western Carolinian, December 24, 1822.

²¹Lefler and Newsome, North Carolina, pp. 334-35.

²²Western Carolinian, October 23, 1821.

²³"THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY," in Western Carolinian, November 19, 1822.

²⁴Western Carolinian, November 18, 1823.

²⁵Johnson, Ante-Bellum North Carolina, p. 788.

²⁶McFarland, "North Carolina Newspapers," pp. 378-79; Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 260 Years, 1690 to 1950 (rev. ed.; New York: MacMillan Company, 1950), p. 200.

²⁷J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, Party Politics in North Carolina, 1835-1860, The James Sprunt Historical Publications, Vol. XV, Nos. 1-2 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1916), p. 26.

²⁸William Roane to Thomas Ruffin, Wentworth [Rockingham County], November 4, 1819, J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, ed., The Papers of Thomas Ruffin (4 vols.; Publications of the North Carolina Historical Commission, Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, 1918), I, 230 (hereinafter cited as Ruffin Papers.)

²⁹McFarland, "North Carolina Newspapers," p. 378.

³⁰Lefler and Newsome, North Carolina, p. 323.

³¹William H. Haywood, Jr., to Willie P. Mangum, Raleigh, December 20, 1823, Henry Thomas Shanks, ed., The Papers of Willie Person Mangum (3 vols.; Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1950), I, 93 (hereinafter cited as Mangum Papers.)

³²Priestly H. Mangum to Willie P. Mangum, Wakefield [Wake County], December 31, 1824, Mangum Papers, I, 164.

³³"THE NEXT PRESIDENT," in Western Carolinian, January 22, 1822.

³⁴Western Carolinian, August 10, 1824.

³⁵See various anti-Milton Gazette editorials in Western Carolinian issues of March 4 and 25, 1823, and February 10, March 2, and May 25, 1824.

CHAPTER II

CHARLES FISHER AND THE CAMPAIGN OF 1824

As previously noted, the Western Carolinian was founded in 1820 by James Krider and Lemuel Bingham. In addition, Charles Fisher admitted to being "somewhat instrumental" in its establishment, "and for some time afterwards occasionally contributed my humble aid to make the Paper as useful and respectable as possible."¹ Beyond this statement, Fisher was consistent in his denials of any special relationship with the paper or its editors. A vast body of evidence exists, however, to refute these denials.² Although never admitted or even hinted at by the Western Carolinian, Charles Fisher was indisputably that journal's ideological guiding light.

Fisher, after serving as state senator from Rowan County in the General Assembly of 1818 and as representative in Congress from the Rowan district from 1819 to 1821, returned to the state legislature to serve as representative either of Rowan County or the Borough of Salisbury almost continuously from 1821 to 1836.³ During this tenure in the North Carolina House of Commons, he was a consistent

champion of the West, particularly with regard to that section's demand for constitutional reform. In addition, he secretly directed the insurgent "People's Ticket" movement to nominate John C. Calhoun for the presidency in 1824 in place of the "regular" nominee of the Republican Congressional Caucus and the eastern-dominated party machine, Secretary of the Treasury William H. Crawford of Georgia.⁴ Fisher's ardent admiration of Calhoun stemmed from the latter's early views on internal improvements. The two men shared a mutual friendship and corresponded freely with each other.⁵

Unfortunately for Fisher, a popular emotional clamor had begun to be heard among the "common people" throughout the state, and especially in the West,⁶ in favor of Andrew Jackson by the early months of 1824. This ultimately resulted in Jackson's nomination by the People's Ticket in place of Calhoun, who never again attained sufficient popular support to qualify him as a serious candidate for the presidency. Of chief importance to this study, however, was Fisher's frequent use of the Western Carolinian as the "most effective agency for his anti-Crawford and pro-Calhoun activity."⁷

On March 18, 1823, Calhoun wrote to Fisher, suggesting that "ground might be taken both in your papers and correspondence of supporting the Carolina candidate [Calhoun]." The South Carolinian attached great significance to this proposal, adding that

Much will depend on the Western Carolinian. It ought to take a decided stand. An expression from it of my strength in the state would tend to animate our friends, and to repel the attempt, made, with so much art, to hold out the idea that I have withdrawn.

Exactly one week later, the following editorial comment appeared in the Western Carolinian: "Mr. Calhoun's chance is equal, at least, to that of any other candidate. As to talents and merits, he is second to none whose claims are before the public" ⁹ This statement marked the journal's first overt endorsement of Calhoun as a potential presidential candidate and was even then carefully phrased as an indignant counter-thrust to a pro-Crawford editorial in the Milton Gazette.

After this cautious hoisting of the Calhoun colors, the Western Carolinian remained virtually silent for the next five months concerning the presidential election. It renewed its activity by responding favorably to an anti-Crawford editorial appearing in the August 15, 1823,

issue of the Raleigh Star, another paper friendly to Calhoun. While devoting the bulk of his comments to Crawford's "waning" popularity, the editor of the Western Carolinian seized the occasion to assert that "it is our honest and firm opinion that Mr. Calhoun, on the score of talents and public services, has higher claims to the Presidency than either of his competitors."¹⁰

This editorial signalled the beginning of an earnest journalistic campaign in Calhoun's behalf which reached a crescendo late in 1823. At that time "half of the newspapers in the State were presenting his claims to the public, and his leaders in other states were lending their influence to his campaign in North Carolina."¹¹ Calhoun appears to have been keenly aware of the value of the press to his cause, expressing to Fisher the belief that the campaign

is really a struggle between the people and the would be leaders and dictators, who by securing the old presses . . . expected to control the power of this government. They believed that the Int[elligence]r, the Register, and the Enquirer,¹² were amply sufficient to secure North Carolina; but facts have proved the calculation to be the idle dream of speculation.¹³

It is significant that during this period only Calhoun and Crawford were receiving the attention of the state's press and that in many respects the Calhoun press exhibited signs

of being more anti-Crawford than pro-Calhoun.¹⁴ In a sense both of these candidates were merely convenient symbols for a deeper, more complex struggle in North Carolina between East and West which had been quietly growing since the close of the War of 1812. This struggle featured a slow but ever-growing awareness that the more conservative East had been awarded political hegemony over the state largely because the West had been unable to secure constitutional reform. First and foremost, of course, were the clauses in the 1776 state constitution providing for legislative apportionment. In addition, the East had come to depend upon two features of the prevailing political system--caucus nomination and the selection of electors by general ticket--further to protect its dominant position. With the approach of the 1824 election, Crawford was recognized and labelled the "caucus candidate" by Charles Fisher and the rival "People's Ticket" forces, who realized that Crawford must be linked in the mind of the public with the political abuses of the era. "To assume the offensive and arouse the indifferent voting population against Crawford and the political system which was controlled by his friends was the strategy of the Crawford opposition from the beginning of the campaign."¹⁵

Even the staunch Western Carolinian expended more editorial space condemning Crawford and the caucus system in general than promoting Calhoun.¹⁶ At other times it appeared that the editor's statements in behalf of Calhoun were deliberately calculated as responses or defenses, rather than as positive assertions. At any rate, a contemporary testified to the paper's considerable anti-Crawford influence in the West, declaring, after a recent trip to Salisbury,

[the] unprincipled W. Carolinian has had its poisonous influences in the Western part of the state where they see no other paper, and hear but little else on the Presidential question. Nor have we [the supporters of Crawford] any chance where only that paper circulates for notwithstanding the Editors [sic] profession he will not publish communications on our side of the question satisfactorily.¹⁷

Another observer writing from the western town of Lincolnton commented on the "powerful opposition" he had encountered in his efforts to promote the Crawford ticket, "first by the friends of Mr. Calhoun, who were numerous and influential."¹⁸

The Western Carolinian's political agitation was not, however, limited entirely to anti-Crawford pronouncements. As early as mid-1822, the editors suggested that General Andrew Jackson, while deserving the "respect and admiration" of his countrymen, was simply not suitable for the presidency:

Place him at the helm in times of great emergency, and he would probably guide the National Ship over the raging . . . ocean of danger into the port of safety; but in a time of tranquillity . . . we should greatly fear he would carry too much sail.¹⁹

Fisher might well have foreseen the great groundswell of popular support for Jackson which began to manifest itself early in 1824. The following sentiments, appearing in the October 21, 1823, issue of the Western Carolinian, reinforce the journal's earlier anti-Jackson stance:

Although we would wish to see Gen. Jackson receive every honor which the . . . American people can bestow upon him, yet we cannot but fear that he is not qualified to make a judicious President of the United States We fear he lacks a competent knowledge of our diplomatic relations, and has not moderation and prudence enough to stand at the helm of State

By February, 1824, however, the paper began to temper its opposition to Jackson in the face of the general's rapidly increasing popularity. In a communication from "a friend to Jackson" appearing with the telltale title "JACKSON AND CALHOUN," we may perceive the first cracks in the journal's wall of resistance²⁰ to the notion of a Jackson candidacy:

The general understanding is, that the People's Ticket will go for the man who is strongest, or who can most likely beat the Radical candidate [Crawford], be he Jackson, or Calhoun Let the friends, then, of those two distinguished candidates, continue, as they have all along done, to act together²¹

The Western Carolinian came ultimately to embrace Andrew Jackson as its "favorite" candidate for the presidency in 1824 and waged a spirited battle in his behalf. In doing so, however, it merely made an expedient detour from the well-worn ideological path of its editors and its mentor, Charles Fisher. Beneath its façade of enthusiastic support for Jackson lay the paper's true political leanings: an uncompromising attachment to John C. Calhoun's belief in the supremacy of the rights of the states. The following editorial, appearing shortly after Calhoun's official withdrawal from the race,²² best illustrates where lay the true affections of the paper's management and at the same time supports the contention that the surrender to Jackson was made "with the understanding that Calhoun at some later date was to have his chance":²³

We believe ours was the first paper in this State, which came out openly and undisguisedly in favor of the claims of Mr. Calhoun to the Presidency. Could we still sustain our favorite candidate . . . we would invoke divine aid in doing so; but it has now become evident he cannot get the vote of Pennsylvania, which so much diminishes his prospects, that we should be foolhardy, indeed, still to urge his friends to support him, at this time. We now feel bound to yield his claims, and co-operate with the friends of Gen. JACKSON²⁴

Thus the Western Carolinian prepared for election

day, 1824, under the Jackson banner, its earlier identification with Calhoun soon to be played down on its editorial pages. And despite Jackson's later defeat for the presidency in the House of Representatives, the paper was soon to enjoy its finest days, remaining at the peak of its influence and prestige during the remainder of the 1820's. Ironically, the journal's unique relationship with Calhoun was to become the single most important factor in bringing about its own decline in influence and prestige with the arrival of the new decade.

³Wheeler, *Historical Sketches*, pp. 392-93.

⁴Letter and Forward, *North Carolina*, pp. 321-23.
The best account of the entire election is Professor Albert Ray Newman's *The Presidential Election of 1824 in North Carolina*, *The James Sprunt Studies in History and Political Science*, Vol. XIII, No. 1 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939).

⁵In one of his letters to Fisher, Calhoun wrote: "You see, I write to you as an old friend, who takes . . . inherent in my fate; and on my part [I] will be at all times happy to hear from you." (Calhoun to F. Fisher, Washington, June 11, 1823, Fisher MSS.)

⁶William Haywood took notice of this phenomenon, writing that . . .

"Genl. J. his very enemies will admit can ensure the vote of this State if they become satisfied that he has any hopes of success elsewhere . . . I derive my impressions of his strength in this State . . . by mingling with the people . . ."

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER TWO

¹In a letter to the editors of the Western Carolinian published in the August 24, 1830, issue, Fisher used these words to describe his relationship with the paper, but vehemently denied having any other influence or connection with it other than as a subscriber "for several years past"

²The Charles Fisher MSS. in the Southern Historical Collection at the library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill abound with expositions in the handwriting of Fisher, many of which appeared later in the Western Carolinian as editorials.

³Wheeler, Historical Sketches, pp. 392-93.

⁴Lefler and Newsome, North Carolina, pp. 323-25. The best account of the entire election is Professor Albert Ray Newsome's The Presidential Election of 1824 in North Carolina, The James Sprunt Studies in History and Political Science, Vol. XXIII, No. 1 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939.)

⁵In one of his letters to Fisher, Calhoun wrote: "You see, I write to you as an old friend, who takes . . . interest in my fate; and on my part [I] will be at all times happy to hear from you." (Calhoun to Fisher, Washington, June 11, 1823, Fisher MSS.)

⁶William Haywood took notice of this phenomenon, writing that

"Genl. J. his very enemies will admit can ensure the vote of this State if they become satisfied that he has any hopes of success elsewhere --I derive my impressions of his strength in this State . . . by mingling with the people . . . --I

am certain I should hazard little in saying that were a ticket formed in N.C. for the . . . candidates now before the public the Genl. would succeed by a majority of no inconsiderable number"

(Haywood to Willie P. Mangum, Raleigh, February 23, 1824, Mangum Papers, I, 119.)

⁷James S. Brawley, The Rowan Story, 1753-1953: A Narrative History of Rowan County, North Carolina (Salisbury, North Carolina: Rowan Printing Company, 1953), p. 110.

⁸Albert Ray Newsome, "Correspondence of John C. Calhoun, George McDuffie and Charles Fisher, Relating to the Presidential Campaign of 1824," North Carolina Historical Review, VII (October, 1930), 479 (hereinafter cited as "Calhoun-Fisher Correspondence.")

⁹Western Carolinian, March 25, 1823.

¹⁰"PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION," in Western Carolinian, August 26, 1823.

¹¹Newsome, "Election of 1824," p. 123.

¹²The Washington National Intelligencer, Raleigh Register, and Richmond Enquirer were all staunch Crawford supporters.

¹³Calhoun to Fisher, Washington, December 2, 1823, Newsome, "Calhoun-Fisher Correspondence," p. 143.

¹⁴Thomas Robson Hay, "John C. Calhoun and the Presidential Campaign of 1824," North Carolina Historical Review, XII (January, 1935), 34.

¹⁵Albert Ray Newsome, "Debate on the Fisher Resolutions," North Carolina Historical Review, IV (October, 1927), 430.

¹⁶During the period between March 25, 1823 (the date that Calhoun's name was first mentioned for the presidency), and March 16, 1824 (the date that the Western Carolinian officially acknowledged Calhoun's withdrawal from the race), the paper utilized approximately twice as much editorial

space denouncing Crawford and the general concept of the caucus as it spent in praising or promoting Calhoun.

¹⁷John W. Long, Jr., to Thomas Ruffin, Randolph County, August 20, 1824, Ruffin Papers, I, 312.

¹⁸Robert Williamson to Bartlett Yancey, Verdant Dale near Lincolnton, July 26, 1824, J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, ed., "Letters to Bartlett Yancey," The James Sprunt Historical Publications, X, No. 2 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1911), 46.

¹⁹Western Carolinian, August 20, 1822.

²⁰On February 7, 1824, Archibald Murphey wrote that he had recently spoken with Fisher, who "seemed to deprecate the Idea of framing a Jackson ticket: He said it would ensure Mr. Crawford's election." Shortly afterward, Murphey again wrote of this resistance to Jackson: "they [the pro-Calhoun forces] cannot . . . be brought to acknowledge that Gen. Jackson has a better Chance." (Murphey to Colonel William Polk, Haw-River, February 7, 1824; Murphey to Polk, Hillsborough, February 27, 1824, William Henry Hoyt, ed., The Papers of Archibald D. Murphey, Publications of the North Carolina Historical Commission [2 vols.; Raleigh: E. M. Uzzell and Company, 1914], I, 289-90, 292).

²¹Western Carolinian, February 17, 1824.

²²Calhoun withdrew upon learning that the Pennsylvania Nominating Convention had selected Jackson as its candidate for president in early March, 1824.

²³McFarland, "North Carolina Newspapers," p. 406.

²⁴"THE PRESIDENCY," in Western Carolinian, March 16, 1824.

CHAPTER III

"A GOOD JACKSON PAPER"

Charles Fisher's employment of the Western Carolinian as a pro-Calhoun vehicle in the prelude to the 1824 elections was followed by a period of relative calm. It should be noted that the emphasis placed upon presidential politics by most early editors produced an ebb and flow of journalistic zeal as election years came and went. This factor explains, to a large degree, why discussions of "the next president" frequently appeared well in advance of election years, often only a matter of months after a newly-elected president had taken office.

The Western Carolinian's editorial pages of 1825-1827 reflect this phenomenon. With an almost audible sigh of relief, the editor declared in May, 1825:

Now that the troubled waters of the political sea are hushed into stillness . . . we hope to devote a greater portion of our columns to such essays and extracts as may tend to cherish those social feelings, without which civilized society loses . . . its charms. In the political department, it is our desire to discard . . . intemperate discussion, and unprofitable disputation, but we invite calm and dignified inquiry and discussion, on all subjects of national importance or local interest.¹

This pledge was well kept in the ensuing months, with such non-political topics as the following appearing regularly under the editorial masthead: "Water Melons" ("For a six-pence, enough may be bought to give two persons a decent kind of dysentery")²

Between presidential elections the Western Carolinian also exhibited the tendency to shift its editorial emphasis back to state issues. Its early devotion to the interests of the politically underrepresented West continued--even in later years when a sudden change in editorial thrust resulted in the paper's identification with other, less popular causes. During the heated presidential campaign of 1824 the paper had declared that "the interest felt by all classes in the approaching Presidential contest, should not induce them to neglect the still more important subject of calling a [constitutional] Convention."³

With characteristic candor, the editor had earlier deemed it "altogether problematical" whether the subject of a constitutional convention might be entertained by the 1826-1827 General Assembly. "But if it is not," mused the editor, "the People ought not to lose sight of this important matter. The manner in which the principle of representation is fixed in North-Carolina, is an anomaly in the

political history of the U. States." This condition, cried the editor, demanded a "political reformation," a cause deemed "as righteous . . . as that in which the great Christian Reformers, Luther and Calvin, were engaged two centuries ago."⁴

Attacking the root problem in state affairs, the underrepresentation of the western counties in the General Assembly, the Western Carolinian published a letter signed "William Tell"⁵ in the editorial column of the April 10, 1827, issue:

The very first principle of republicanism teaches us that the voice of a majority of the people shall rule. Is that majority in the West, or East? Look at the statistical tables, and you at once perceive the enormous disparity in numbers between the West and East. The proportion in favor of the West, is as five to three.⁶ And yet who rule the State? The East, to be sure. For twenty years, with one single exception, our Governors have been appointed by a set of men usually denominated the "Warrenton Junto."⁷ Many of our Judges, qualified or not, have had their rise in this way. Let them [the easterners] cry out republicanism! --let them talk of using the power they unjustly hold over us, with moderation, --the dignity of the State is compromised by our pusillanimity, in a blind submission to them.

Similarly, other pressing state problems came under discussion during the post-election lull. Commenting on the great tide of emigration from the state which was so prevalent during this period,⁸ the editor lamented that

there is something wrong in the policy of North-Carolina--otherwise so many of her natives would not desert the soil of their birth . . . and seek new homes in the wilds of the West. But it is not in numbers alone that the state is a loser: enterprize, talents, and wealth, are all travelling [sic] West! Will our legislature do nothing to check this state of things? We are all well aware that it cannot be entirely stopped; but much can be done . . . by bringing into action, the moral and physical resources of the state: Provide means for educating the rising generation; go on with the work of Internal Improvement; reform the constitution of the State! and let all freemen into an equal share of political privileges . . . : Do this, and you will put a check to that emigration⁹

The subject of railroads brought an early nod of approval from the editor, who judged them "well calculated to suit the local circumstances of North-Carolina." The establishment of "a well devised system of rail-roads," he observed, "would contribute more than any thing else to brighten the prospects of North Carolina."¹⁰

With the approach of the presidential election of 1828, an increasing degree of national politics found its way back into the editorial columns of the Western Carolinian. It should be noted, however, that this campaign differed in many respects from the highly-charged election of 1824. Political conditions in North Carolina had been considerably altered during the years between the two elections, with the slaveholding East having come to support

Andrew Jackson as the only viable alternative to the highly unpopular John Quincy Adams.¹¹ Since 1825, in fact, Jackson's ultimate victory in North Carolina was seldom in doubt, and, as a result, the campaign was conducted in a more restrained manner. "The great majority of the people felt little concern over the election, and it was not until the autumn of 1827 that the campaign began in earnest."¹² Likewise, the state press exhibited little of the concern shown in 1824. In September, 1826, an observer residing in the West noted that "very little is said on that subject [the election] in N.C. The public presses have not Taken their stand, [sic] Genl. Jackson got the state before and it is more than probable that he will get the state again"¹³

The Western Carolinian's editorials on the subject likewise reflected the prevailing optimism regarding Jackson's political fortunes. In January, 1827, the paper expressed the belief that more "unity of interest" was to be found throughout North Carolina on the presidential question than had existed "for [the previous] fifteen or twenty years."¹⁴ It is interesting to note that while this view was essentially correct as to popular sentiment,¹⁵ it fell short of its mark in regard to newspaper opinion in the state.

Surprisingly, John Quincy Adams received almost the same degree of newspaper support in 1828 as did Jackson.¹⁶

"An intelligent people," sniffed the confident editor, "need no . . . stimulants, to incite them to act correctly: calmly furnish them with facts, and, in the main, they will come to a judicious conclusion" ¹⁷ An editorial entitled "Catching at Straws," appearing in the issue of November 6, 1827, further reflected this air of confidence:

There is not an intelligent politician in the state . . . that seriously believes that there is any more doubt about the vote of North-Carolina, than there is that of Tennessee [Jackson's home state]. Mr. Adams cannot, in any contingency, receive more than the [sic] third of the votes of . . . this state at the next election: and in conceding thus much, we appeal to the unbiased [sic] judgment of any candid man, who is at all acquainted with the sentiments of the great mass of the people

Jackson's election represents, perhaps, the high-water mark of the Western Carolinian's influence in its twenty-four year history. Well before 1828 the journal had become thoroughly identified as an "important ally" of the Jackson cause and had rid itself, publicly at least, of its earlier identification with the presidential aspirations of John C. Calhoun. In addition, the paper had survived several changes in ownership and management as well as the

threat of competition from additional "western" newspapers which had sprung up during the period from 1820 to 1828. These included, in addition to the Milton Gazette and the Hillsborough Recorder (both of which had come into existence in the same year the Western Carolinian was founded), the (Salisbury) Yadkin and Catawba Journal (founded May 20, 1828, but formerly published at Charlotte as the Catawba Journal) and the Greensboro Patriot (founded in January, 1826, as the [Greensboro] Carolina Patriot).¹⁸ Despite the threat posed by these potential rivals for the western readership, the Western Carolinian remained the leading newspaper of the region. The following boast, appearing in mid-1829, best reflects the journal's position at the zenith of its power and influence:

Our last No. . . . commenced the tenth year since the establishment of the Western Carolinian. Its success has exceeded the anticipations of the Editor; it now has a greater circulation than any other paper in the State--with the exception, perhaps, of those at the seat of government [Raleigh].¹⁹

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER THREE

¹"TO OUR PATRONS," in Western Carolinian, May 31, 1825.

²August 9, 1825.

³Western Carolinian, June 22, 1824.

⁴"THE LEGISLATURE," in Western Carolinian, December 26, 1826.

⁵Such letters, more often than not signed with a classical pen-name such as "Publius," "Brutus," etc., were generally welcomed by early editors as a source of community news or controversial subject matter (Johnson, Ante-Bellum North Carolina, p. 782).

⁶Here the editor is guilty of minor hyperbole. The Census of 1820 reveals that the true ratio of western white population to that of the East was approximately 5.7 to 4.3.

⁷The "Warrenton Junto" was a tightly-organized group of eastern North Carolina politicians led by the venerable Nathaniel Macon of Warrenton. The group dominated the General Assembly during the first twenty-five years of the nineteenth century and resisted nearly all efforts of the western representatives to secure reforms of the state's constitutional and political processes.

⁸Although this emigration did not reach its crest until the decade of the 1830's--during which thirty-one of the state's sixty-eight counties actually sustained losses in their respective total populations--Rowan County was experiencing such a loss between 1820 and 1830, when the total population decreased from 26,009 to 20,786. This problem had long been recognized and commented upon by observers throughout North Carolina, who acknowledged that the state's "poor, contracted, and ungrateful" condition was indeed "a

strong temptation for youth of aspiring views to leave it" (Hamilton, Party Politics, pp. 16-17; Census of 1820, I; U.S., Census Office, Fifth Census: Or, Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States, As Corrected at the Department of State, 1830 [Washington: Duff Green, 1832]; Robert Hall Morrison to William A. Graham, Near Charlotte, September 12, 1827, J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, ed., The Papers of William Alexander Graham [4 vols.; Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1957], I, 156, herein-after cited as Graham Papers.)

⁹"Emigration from NORTH CAROLINA," in Western Carolinian, April 26, 1825.

¹⁰"RAIL ROADS," in Western Carolinian, February 28, 1826.

¹¹Lefler and Newsome, North Carolina, p. 327.

¹²William S. Hoffmann, Andrew Jackson and North Carolina Politics, The James Sprunt Studies in History and Political Science, Vol. XL, _____ (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958), p. 16.

¹³William Davidson to James K. Polk, Charlotte, September 18, 1826, in Elizabeth Gregory McPherson, ed., "Unpublished Letters From North Carolinians to Polk," North Carolina Historical Review, XVI (January, 1939), 57.

¹⁴"POLITICS OF NORTH CAROLINA," in Western Carolinian, January 23, 1827.

¹⁵Jackson's victory was by any standard a complete landslide, which "shocked" the Adams men. In terms of the popular vote, Jackson received 37,857 ballots to Adams' 13,918. Significantly, Adams carried only eight of the state's sixty-four counties (Hoffmann, Andrew Jackson, p. 25).

¹⁶McFarland, "North Carolina Newspapers," p. 378.

¹⁷"THE PRESIDENCY," in Western Carolinian, May 8, 1827.

¹⁸Johnson, Ante-Bellum North Carolina, pp. 768-69;

Ethel Stephens Arnett, William Swaim, Fighting Editor: The Story of O. Henry's Grandfather (Greensboro, North Carolina: Piedmont Press, 1963), pp. 60-61.

¹⁹Western Carolinian, June 9, 1829.

CHAPTER IV
SEEDS OF DESTRUCTION

On June 15, 1830, readers of the Western Carolinian were informed that the paper had been sold by Philo White, its editor since 1820 and owner since 1823, to H. Jefferson Jones and Burton Craige. Along with Charles Fisher, White had been a staunch supporter of John C. Calhoun for the presidency in 1824, but had later yielded to the superior popularity of Andrew Jackson. Since that time, White had been almost solely responsible for shaping the paper into "an able Jackson organ." He was rewarded by Jackson for this devotion with an appointment as Naval Agent for the Pacific Station in 1830, which made it necessary for him to dispose of the Western Carolinian, with "deep and feeling regret." It is a tribute to White that, upon his return to North Carolina in 1834, he was urged by friends to establish a new Democratic newspaper at Raleigh to combat the influence of two powerful Whig organs located there.¹

In his farewell editorial White expressed the belief that the principles he had avowed would be preserved and promoted by the new owners:

In disposing of the concern to Messrs. JONES & CRAIGE, he [White] has consulted more the essential interests of the Republican Party . . . than his own private advantage. In their hands . . . the cause of Republicanism may be safely confided, and . . . by them it will ever be supported with dignity and devotion.²

For their part, Jones and Craige responded in a lengthy exposition which characterized the type of ideological diatribes which were to appear with regularity during the ensuing three years. After professing their intentions to preserve Republicanism "in its pure and unalloyed sense," the new owners plunged headlong into a rambling discussion of states' rights and the nature of the Union:

In entering into the compact, which at present forms the basis of association between the different states, the parties to it did not intend to part with any other powers, than those which are expressly relinquished and forbidden³

This subject, of itself, was nothing unusual. Federal-state relations had long been a popular topic for debate in legislative halls and in newspapers. With the enactment of the "Tariff of Abominations" in May, 1828, and the resultant threat on the part of South Carolina to nullify the tariff within that state's boundaries, the topic became an especially timely one. As early as April of that year, a correspondent of North Carolina Chief Justice Thomas Ruffin

expressed his fears for the safety of the Union in the face of increasing complaints from the people regarding the depressed financial conditions of the time:

It may be that the "partnership" will be in danger of dissolution--And that the most strenuous efforts of every lover of the Union may be called into requisition to preserve its integrity, -- and avert the dreadful consequences of such an event. The fact is, ⁴this matter is too much talked about already

What made Jones and Craige's lengthy dissertation on states' rights noteworthy was the very fact that it appeared under the editorial masthead of the Western Carolinian.

Under the leadership of Philo White, the editorial columns had been remarkably free from any hint of disunion sentiment. "With much pleasure" White had reported to his readers in early 1827 that the "unhappy controversy" between the United States and the State of Georgia concerning the disposition of the Creek Indian lands had been settled amicably and without "that worst of calamities to our country, a civil war" ⁵ From the enactment of the Tariff of Abominations in mid-1828 until his disposition of the Western Carolinian two years later, White invariably kept his editorial columns free from any trace of nullification sentiment. This is especially noteworthy when his personal fondness for Calhoun is recalled. At any rate, the new

owners quite obviously perceived things in a different light.

As in the case of James Krider, one of the original founders of the Western Carolinian, little is known of H. Jefferson Jones. He remained connected with the journal for only one year, during which time he was in charge of its "editorial department."⁶ Controversy surrounding the paper's new pro-nullification image, as well as personal animosities engendered by a libel suit against him and his partner, made things "too hot" for Jones; he thereupon dissolved his connection with the journal.⁷ In a farewell editorial Jones testified to the great ill-will and public disfavor with which the new editors' extreme states' rights stance had been received, noting that the paper's enemies had "intended to invalidate, and if possible, destroy [it]. . . ."⁸

Burton Craige was made of sterner stuff. Only nineteen years old when he became co-owner of the Western Carolinian, Craige had recently graduated from the University of North Carolina and was engaged in the study of law under David F. Caldwell⁹ while involved with his new journalistic duties. Before disposing of the paper in 1833, he was admitted to the bar and was thus a practicing lawyer as well as a newspaper editor during much of this period. Known for his outspoken advocacy of states' rights and enthusiastic

support for John C. Calhoun, he acquired the journal at the height of the nullification controversy. "The transfer was probably engineered by Charles Fisher . . . and possibly by Calhoun."¹⁰ During his final months as owner and editor of the Western Carolinian, Craige served as the Town of Salisbury's representative in the North Carolina House of Commons, and later returned to serve as Rowan County's representative from 1834 to 1836. After 1836 he devoted all of his energies to his law practice and never again returned to elected public office or to journalism.¹¹ The degree of Craige's lifetime devotion to the principle of states' rights is indicated by the fact that he introduced North Carolina's Ordinance of Secession (the "Craige Ordinance") of May 20, 1861.¹²

Jones and Craige avoided an outright endorsement of nullification in their first five issues. They did, however, make it clear that they strongly supported President Jackson's veto of the Maysville Road Bill and strongly opposed the Tariff of 1828, justifying each position by means of their own interpretations of the constitution.¹³ In a formal prospectus appearing in their third issue, the new owners professed themselves to be "ardently attached to the good cause of our country, with which we consider identified the

security and perpetuation of the Union"4 Yet one week later they were contradicting this sentiment, opining that

None, who have witnessed the struggle between the parties identified by the names of Northern and Southern can, if they look with an unjaundiced eye, doubt the patriotism and generous ardour of the latter, whilst the former manifested an obstinate adherence to opinions, deriving their origin from self-aggrandizement. The one governed and directed entirely by principle; the other led by views of self-interest, evidencing a temper of mind indifferent to all constitutional rules.¹⁵

Two weeks later, the editors had progressed to the stage of outright endorsement of the South Carolina position:

The people of S. Carolina harbour no rebellious intentions, and . . . we . . . applaud the course which we believe that state will pursue in relation to the many manifest violations of the Federal compact, and Virginia and North Carolina will most cordially lend their aid in support of any measures she may adopt.¹⁶

Jones and Craige, in defending nullification, swam against strong currents of popular opinion flowing throughout the state in opposition to Calhoun's position. Independence Day, 1830, had witnessed a plethora of anti-nullification toasts and orations in nearly every county and--while the controversial tariff received its share of criticism--strong unionist sentiment carried the day with near unanimity.¹⁷ Only in the state's southernmost parts, where stronger commercial ties with South Carolina were in evidence, did nullification receive any material public support.¹⁸

Jones and Craige at first seemed almost oblivious to the fact that their editorial stance violated the commonly-held precepts of a vast majority of their readership. Obviously, the readers of the Western Carolinian responded quite negatively to the heavyhanded editorials of the new proprietors. Gone was the "light touch" and occasional humor displayed by Philo White; in its place was to be found a stern and uncompromising view of affairs which held that the South's active defense of its states' rights transcended all other considerations. Only six weeks after commencing their new duties, the editors made reference to a telltale item of local gossip which brought from them an indignant rebuttal:

We . . . notice a report which we understand has been . . . circulated through this and the neighboring counties It is rumored through the country . . . that we are the advocates of Disunion, and warmly inculcate principles, which, if carried . . . into practice, would lead to a dismemberment of the confederacy. If a veneration for the Constitution of the United States, and an ardent zeal for its preservation can constitute us as Disunionists, then indeed are we such

Perhaps there is . . . another reason why we are called disunionists--that is, because we will not join in the hue and cry against our sister State, South Carolina, and charge her with treason and Disunion

We appeal to our past course for the refutation of the charge, of Disunion, and invite a critical examination of our language in relation

to the wrongs which have been inflicted upon the South by the General Government¹⁹

Shortly afterward, there appeared further evidence that all was not well between the Western Carolinian and its readership. The editors saw fit to deny rumor suggesting that its readership had dropped off substantially by reason of the journal's new pro-nullification image:

We must in justice to ourselves put a stop to a false report which is now sedulously employed to injure this paper, to wit; that forty or fifty persons have withdrawn their patronage from us. Since the circulation of the libellous report that we were favourers and advocates of Disunion, we have had TWO discontinuances . . . because, as they alledge [sic], we were disloyal to the constitution, and two . . . discontinued without . . . any reason. To balance and counter-vail these . . . we have had TWENTY ONE new subscribers, added to our list, within the last fifteen or eighteen days. So much for the cry of Disunion!²⁰

Whether the rumor was true or false, the important fact was that the editors were reduced to using their editorial columns to refute unfavorable public discussion of their journal.

Another suggestion of reader unrest came with a lengthy denial by the editors that they were under the influence of Charles Fisher. Apparently this long-dormant suspicion had again reared its head during the nullification controversy, prompting Jones and Craige to assert:

We do not consider ourselves under the influence

of any man or set of men. We think for ourselves and act for ourselves. Our support of State Rights has originated from the virtue and impulse of a conviction that the great principles professed and practised by Mr. Jefferson, are the only political rules to which we can safely adhere²¹

For his part, Fisher admitted to having been approached by Philo White and offered the Western Carolinian, which he declined, but steadfastly refused to acknowledge any connection with the journal other than as a subscriber and personal friend to the editors.²²

Ultimately, Jones and Craige saw fit to make at least one minor concession to outraged public opinion:

We have purposely refrained from the use of the word "nullification" simply because we knew a set of discontented wretches who wish to foment discord and disunion, had represented the meaning of the word to be "disunion" shrouded in the hideous and horrible mantle of civil war.²³

Seemingly now mindful of the enmity of its readers for the nullification philosophy, the editors backed and filled during the ensuing weeks, content to advance the standard arguments in favor of states' rights. Apparently the urge to return to a philosophical defense of nullification was too great to resist, however, for within a short time the spirit, if not the letter, of nullification reappeared in the journal. "The general government," cried the editors, "has no right

to exercise a power which is forbidden to it in the charter of its creation, [sic] if so the act must be null and void and is not binding upon the States or the people of the States."²⁴

The readers of the Western Carolinian were not the only group to take notice of the new thrust of the journal. The editors of rival newspapers were quick to condemn the views of Jones and Craige. Of the twenty-one papers in existence in 1830, "at least twelve . . . were strongly opposed to nullification." Only four journals--the Halifax Roanoke Advocate, the New Bern Sentinel, the Tarborough North Carolina Free Press, and to some extent the Raleigh Star--joined the Western Carolinian in support of the South Carolina doctrine.²⁵ The other five papers apparently remained neutral. Protesting the vehemence exhibited by the anti-nullification editors, Jones and Craige at one point wrapped themselves in the mantle of journalistic ethics:

We have been very unwillingly driven to cut the acquaintance of some half a dozen public prints who have bespattered us with their low, abusive billingsgate. We trust we shall not again be called upon to carry into practice our determination to hold no communion with the Editors of abusive papers. If they cannot meet us in the fair open field of discussion we shall not turn at their invitation into the filthy alleys of vituperation.²⁶

Another area of concern to the editors was the charge that the Western Carolinian under Jones and Craige had lost its identification with the popular Jackson Administration. In October, 1831, Nathaniel Palmer of Salisbury wrote to Senator Willie P. Mangum, charging that "The Western Carolinian is a real Calhoun press, though to keep in with the people he [Craige] still holds out Jackson colours. The people, however, are suspicious of him" ²⁷ In apparent anticipation of such charges, Craige (sole owner of the journal since June 6, 1831) made frequent mention of his devotion to Jackson throughout mid-1831, pledging sustained support for his re-election "unless he departs entirely from the principles of the party which elected him . . . which we do not believe he will do." ²⁸ Four months later, Craige had advanced to the position that "the existence of the Republican party depends upon the re-election of Gen. Jackson" ²⁹ The following editorial comments, however, provide evidence of a widespread popular belief in the Western Carolinian's abandonment of Jackson:

We have learned from respectable authority, that we have been misrepresented by certain debauched tools, whose business it is to hawk and convey false reports and accusations against us from one section of this part of the State to another, ---that we are hostile to Gen. Jackson

and out against his re-election. We repeat this is false. None have labored harder, to unfold the policy of the present administration, than ourselves We cannot ride from Court-House to Court-House to meet and repel the slanderous charges which are made against our Press by our enemies.³⁰

In fact, Craige's hostility was directed not at Jackson but rather at Jackson's hand-picked choice for a running mate in the 1832 elections, Martin Van Buren of New York. Much of this hostility no doubt derived from Craige's personal animosity toward the New Yorker as a "malign influence" on Jackson during the Eaton Affair, which resulted in the forced resignation of Secretary of the Navy John Branch (himself a North Carolinian) from Jackson's first-term cabinet.³¹ Craige, an ally of Branch, immediately set about to undermine Van Buren as a potential vice presidential candidate by associating him directly with the hated tariffs of 1824 and 1828. Specifically, in a series of editorials appearing early in 1832, Craige labeled Van Buren a "Tariff man" and condemned him for his support of "internal improvement by the general government." In addition, Craige was one of the first North Carolina editors to endorse Philip P. Barbour of Virginia for the vice presidency in lieu of Van Buren.³² This endorsement, in turn, reinforced the Western Carolinian's image as a

pro-nullification organ, due to the widely-held belief that Barbour was himself a nullifier. In fact, "the Barbour party was not composed of nullifiers, but almost all of the state's nullifiers were in the [pro-Barbour] group."³³

Thus, while faithfully reiterating his editorial support of Andrew Jackson in the 1832 election, Burton Craige obviously supported the "Old Hero" with strong reservations. R. J. Yancey, Jr., writing to Willie P. Mangum early in 1832, perhaps expressed Craige's reaction to the notion of a Jackson-Van Buren ticket:

I am disappointed, and fear he will be made V. President. For one I would greatly prefer a Southern man . . . or some man from our own North Carolina I go for Jackson because we cannot better ourselves--but we have every hope, and reasonable hope too, that we can secure the second officer [the vice president] to our interest³⁴

In addition to its emphasis upon the unpopular nullification movement and its loss of identification with the then-popular administration of Andrew Jackson, the Western Carolinian under Craige lost considerable prestige as the voice of the underrepresented West in state affairs. During the nullification crisis the residents of western North Carolina apparently were beset by severe economic conditions. A contemporary, residing in Salisbury, testified

to the "declination in the price of Land" and the "downward course of depression" prevalent in the West at this time.³⁵

Another writer mentioned this depressed financial condition and, in his own ungrammatical fashion, lay the blame for it directly at the feet of the eastern-dominated General Assembly:

Roads impassable no money amog us; the Legislator got the Devil in it and we are all going down together.

was I in the west I would Rise in Mass and force a [constitutional] Convention. I have never Seen the wrong so plain before.³⁶

Despite this evidence of economic discontent in the West, the Western Carolinian under Burton Craige seemed too occupied with constitutional theory and the overriding issue of states' rights to concern itself with its traditional role as spokesman for the neglected West.

Although the Western Carolinian had taken constitutional revision as its theme in its Prospectus of 1820, more recently it had been quiet on the subject.

After 1829 . . . the West had a new champion and a new weapon for waging its battles. The Greensborough Patriot became the outspoken voice of the so-called back country. In the early 1830's, the Western Carolinian lost prestige because it favored nullification.³⁷

Thus, within one year after the journal was sold by Philo White to H. Jefferson Jones and Burton Craige, it had lost its decade-old standing as the preeminent spokesman for

its geographic region. More important, it had alienated a sizeable portion of its readership and had incurred the wrath of newspaper editors throughout the state. In the eyes of the public there was now no doubt as to where the paper stood. In mid-June, 1831, Burton Craige--in an uncharacteristic understatement--assessed the results of one year's labor under the banner of nullification:

We are rejoiced at one thing. Our political opinions are now so well known that none can expect . . . to do us any damage by an attempt at misrepresentation. We have recorded our faith too often for it to be misunderstood.³⁸

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER IV

¹Johnson, Ante-Bellum North Carolina, p. 770.

²"TO THE PATRONS OF THIS PAPER," in Western Carolinian, June 15, 1830.

³Western Carolinian, June 15, 1830.

⁴Daniel M. Barringer to Thomas Ruffin, Hillsboro, April 7, 1828, Ruffin Papers, I, 441.

⁵"GEORGIA and the UNITED STATES," in Western Carolinian, March 13, 1827.

⁶Western Carolinian, June 6, 1831.

⁷Brawley, The Rowan Story, pp. 131-32.

⁸Western Carolinian, June 6, 1831.

⁹Caldwell, born in Iredell County in 1792, served as one of Iredell's representatives in the North Carolina House of Commons for several years. He later moved his residence to Salisbury, where he entered upon the practice of law and served as state senator from the Rowan district from 1829 through 1831. During this period he was widely known for his strong unionist views (Wheeler, Historical Sketches, p. 217.)

¹⁰Brawley, The Rowan Story, p. 131.

¹¹Wheeler, Historical Sketches, p. 395.

¹²W. W. Holden, Address on the History of Journalism in North Carolina Delivered by W. W. Holden, at the Ninth Annual Meeting of the Press Association of North Carolina, Held at Winston, June 21, 1881 (2d ed.; Raleigh: News and Observer Job Print, n. d.) p. 15.

¹³"The President's Message" and "The Public Debt," in Western Carolinian, June 22, 1830.

¹⁴"PROSPECTUS FOR THIS PAPER," in Western Carolinian, June 29, 1830.

¹⁵Western Carolinian, July 6, 1830.

¹⁶Western Carolinian, July 20, 1830.

¹⁷Henry McGilbert Wagstaff, State Rights and Political Parties in North Carolina, 1776-1861, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Series XXIV, Nos. 7-8 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1906), pp. 50-51.

¹⁸Joseph Carlyle Sitterson, The Secession Movement in North Carolina, The James Sprunt Studies in History and Political Science, Vol. XXIII, No. 2 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), p. 31.

¹⁹"The Union," in Western Carolinian, July 27, 1830.

²⁰Western Carolinian, August 17, 1830.

²¹"Remarks by the Editors," in Western Carolinian, August 24, 1830.

²²Letter from Charles Fisher to the Editors of the Western Carolinian, published in Western Carolinian, August 24, 1830.

²³Western Carolinian, September 14, 1830.

²⁴Western Carolinian, November 9, 1830.

²⁵McFarland, "North Carolina Newspapers," pp. 378-79.

²⁶Western Carolinian, May 30, 1831.

²⁷Nathaniel J. Palmer to Willie P. Mangum, Milton, October 21, 1831, Mangum Papers, I, 415.

²⁸Western Carolinian, June 13, 1831.

²⁹Western Carolinian, October 31, 1831.

³⁰"OUR OWN AFFAIRS," in Western Carolinian, October 17, 1831.

³¹William S. Hoffmann, "John Branch and the Origins of the Whig Party in North Carolina," North Carolina Historical Review, XXXV (July, 1958), 303-305.

³²Western Carolinian, April 9, 1832.

³³Hoffmann, Andrew Jackson, p. 54.

³⁴R. J. Yancey, Jr., to Willie P. Mangum, Oxford, February 11, 1832, Mangum Papers, I, 480.

³⁵James Martin, Jr., to Willie P. Mangum, Salisbury, December 27, 1831, Mangum Papers, I, 440, 441.

³⁶Dr. Benjamin Bullock to Willie P. Mangum, Knapp Reeds [Granville County], January 13, 1832, Mangum Papers, I, 444.

³⁷Arnett, William Swaim, pp. 271, 181.

³⁸Western Carolinian, June 13, 1831.

CHAPTER V

ROWAN RIVALRY

The eve of the 1832 election witnessed, perhaps, one of the high-water marks of political excitement in antebellum North Carolina. The overriding political issue at this time was the debate over nullification of the tariff.¹ Nowhere was this question more hotly debated than in the Western Carolinian's home county of Rowan. To a considerable degree, the very existence of the strongly pro-nullification journal contributed to this condition.

Shortly after Jefferson Jones and Burton Craige had acquired the Western Carolinian, Judge James Martin, Jr. of Salisbury cancelled his subscription to the paper because, as he alleged, it gave too much support to nullification and states' rights. Jones and Craige hotly denied Martin's allegations and were in turn sued for libel by Martin. Despite a jury verdict of not guilty, the heated exchange of words and the subsequent trial was a foretaste of the political excitement to be found in Rowan County.²

During this period the State of North Carolina was divided into three "emerging" political groupings, "each

with a more or less definite governmental program in view, and each emphasizing that policy before the personality of its candidate."³ The so-called National Republicans, led by Henry Clay, stood in favor of a national bank, internal improvements by the federal government, a protective tariff, and generally a "loose construction" of the constitution, which would permit the federal government a wide latitude for its activities; the National Republicans were seen as the spiritual heirs of the Federalists. The so-called "Branch Faction," so named because the group had initially rallied together behind former Secretary of the Navy John Branch upon his dismissal from Jackson's cabinet, was composed chiefly of former Jackson supporters who nevertheless opposed Martin Van Buren because of his pro-tariff views. They generally favored state sovereignty and a "strict construction" of the constitution, and strongly opposed the national bank and the protective tariff. Within the ranks of the "regular" Democrats, the cult of personality tended to prevail over issues. Not all of Andrew Jackson's supporters agreed with his opposition to internal improvements, his refusal to enforce the terms of the protective tariff, and especially his predilection for Martin Van Buren; they were willing, however, to give the Old Hero their votes,

feeling that they could indeed do "no better" elsewhere.

At the outset of the campaign, Branch's group was regarded as the "strongest political faction in the state" and received considerable support in the state's press. Charles Fisher, "the second most influential member of the group," wielded his considerable influence to "bring as many western Republicans into the group as possible" in order to defeat Van Buren.⁴

In Western North Carolina, and especially in the Rowan County area, the Branch Faction possessed a powerful journalistic voice in Burton Craige and the Western Carolinian. The paper's seemingly incessant barrage against Van Buren was offset only by the comparatively feeble voice of its sole Rowan rival, Lemuel Bingham's Yadkin and Catawba Journal. Bingham, who had served with Philo White as co-editor of the Western Carolinian between 1821 and 1823 and had supported the National Republican faction of John Quincy Adams in the elections of 1824 and 1828, now gave his support to Henry Clay. The Yadkin and Catawba Journal was at this time "one of the few open supporters of a federal protective tariff in North Carolina" ⁵ Thus, at the outset of 1832, both the anti-Van Buren Branch Faction and the pro-tariff National Republicans were represented in and

around Rowan County. Only the party "regulars" who stood behind Jackson and Jackson's choice of Van Buren for a running mate were without journalistic representation in Rowan County at the outset of the campaign.

The problem was, of course, that neither the pro-tariff Clay nationalists nor the nullification-tainted Branch group represented the bulk of western North Carolina's public opinion at this time. To begin with, "the dominant political sentiment of North Carolina was hostile to the protective tariff."⁶ Burton Craige was essentially correct on this point when in early 1832 he expressed the opinion that Clay's views were "almost universally condemned, by the people"⁷ On the other hand, the Branch Faction's pro-nullification image prevented it from receiving widespread popular support. As this image grew, a considerable number of Van Buren's earlier enemies began to temper their opposition to the New Yorker and to abandon Philip P. Barbour. Edward J. Hale, influential editor of the Fayetteville Observer and an early ally of Branch, for example, later reversed his position in response to the spectre of nullification and threw his considerable support to the Jackson-Van Buren ticket. Because of the widespread unpopularity of the South Carolina doctrine "the politicians were

deserting Branch to follow the lead of the people."⁸

It is extremely important to this study to recognize the scope of unionist sentiment which prevailed in the minds of North Carolinians throughout this period. The "lead of the people" was indeed in the direction of consolidation and general moderation. "In North Carolina," wrote one contemporary, "I know of but one feeling, a feeling of the deepest horror, at the very thought of a dissolution of the Union."⁹ This overriding devotion to union caused many of Jackson's enemies to forget personal animosities and to support the Jackson-Van Buren ticket as a means of discrediting Barbour and the Branch Faction. This phenomenon was especially prevalent in Rowan County.¹⁰

In the autumn of 1831 Benjamin Palmer, one of Salisbury's leading citizens, had described, in a letter to his brother, a movement then afoot among the citizens of Salisbury to initiate a newspaper that might "do justice to their [true] interests and feelings." This movement was led by Hamilton C. Jones (no relation to H. Jefferson Jones, former editor of the Western Carolinian) who, despite the existence both of the Western Carolinian and the Yadkin and Catawba Journal, was able to secure "the rise of 300 subscribers for starting a new paper in Salisbury."¹¹

Jones was born in Virginia in 1798, but was reared in Stokes County, North Carolina, and graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1818. He was an "able lawyer" and served several terms as a representative of Rowan County in the General Assembly. He established the Carolina Watchman on July 28, 1832, with the assistance of Judge James Martin, Jr. and David F. Caldwell, another influential politician and future Whig Party leader in the state.¹² Although James S. Brawley suggests in his comprehensive history of Rowan County that anti-Jackson sentiments motivated Jones in his desire to begin the Carolina Watchman, the overwhelming evidence indicates that Jones' primary purpose was to combat the influence of Burton Craige's pro-nullification views.¹³ A brief history of the Carolina Watchman, appearing in that journal in 1888, notes that

The design of its establishment was to combat the nullification movement of that time The late . . . Burton Craige was then editor of the Western Carolinian . . . and was a zealous advocate of the views of Mr. Calhoun; and his vigorous editorials were producing a rousing influence in Western North Carolina, which alarmed the Unionists and induced active opposition on their part to the spread of the violent remedy . . . and the establishment of the WATCHMAN was the result.¹⁴

Public opinion regarding the pros and cons of nullification was especially vocal in the Salisbury area.

Professor William S. Hoffmann notes that

During the [nullification] crisis scurrilous name calling frequently characterized the pronouncements of both unionists and nullification sympathizers. In Rowan County the abuse was especially bitter and almost culminated in a duel between the rival leaders [David F. Caldwell and Charles Fisher].¹⁵

James Graham, writing to his brother from the western town of Rutherfordton, remarked that "in the neighboring counties the political excitement is beginning to arouse the feelings of the people" ¹⁶ Nearly fifteen months later, Graham found the climate of the Rowan region little changed. "I think," he wrote, [that] "the state of society about Salisbury must be more embittered than any region of the State known to me."¹⁷

With the appearance of the Carolina Watchman on the eve of the 1832 election, the town of Salisbury possessed a journalistic voice in every political camp: Lemuel Bingham's Yadkin and Catawba Journal supported Clay and Sergeant; Burton Craige's Western Carolinian supported Jackson and Barbour; and Hamilton Jones' nascent Carolina Watchman supported Jackson and Van Buren. The results of the election testify to the Western Carolinian's tenacious grip upon the public opinion of its home county, even in the face of the increased journalistic competition and the increasing

unpopularity of nullification. To a limited degree the outcome represented a victory of sorts for Burton Craige. Despite the fact that the Jackson-Van Buren ticket swept the state as a whole, the Jackson-Barbour ticket triumphed in Rowan County by a decided majority. Only four other counties yielded majorities to Barbour and one additional county awarded him a plurality of its ballots.¹⁸ It might be said that the election of 1832 won a battle for the Western Carolinian but helped it to lose a war. Professor Hoffmann points out that "in a sense the election was a victory of unionism over Southern nationalism. The two national tickets [Jackson-Van Buren and Clay-Sergeant] carried almost 87 per cent of the vote."¹⁹ Thus, Craige and the Western Carolinian emerged from the election of 1832 with a victory in Rowan County, but the doctrine to which they had subscribed met with complete rejection at the hands of North Carolina's voters.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER V

¹William K. Boyd, "Federal Politics in North Carolina, 1824-1836," South Atlantic Quarterly, XVIII (April, 1919), 168.

²McFarland, "North Carolina Newspapers," pp. 406-407.

³Samuel Rhea Gammon, Jr., The Presidential Campaign of 1832, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Series XL, No. 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1922), p. 135.

⁴Hoffmann, Andrew Jackson, pp. 45, 47.

⁵McFarland, "North Carolina Newspapers," p. 408.

⁶Boyd, "Federal Politics," p. 168.

⁷Western Carolinian, February 6, 1832.

⁸Hoffmann, "John Branch," p. 308.

⁹John Scott to Willie P. Mangum, Hillsborough, December 18, 1831, Mangum Papers, I, 432.

¹⁰Hoffmann, Andrew Jackson, pp. 54-55.

¹¹Nathaniel J. Palmer to Willie P. Mangum, Milton, October 21, 1831, Mangum Papers, I, 432.

¹²Brawley, The Rowan Story, p. 114; McFarland, "North Carolina Newspapers," p. 407.

¹³Brawley, The Rowan Story, p. 113.

¹⁴Carolina Watchman, October 18, 1888.

¹⁵Hoffmann, Andrew Jackson, p. 66.

¹⁶James Graham to William A. Graham, Rutherfordton,
June 18, 1832, Graham Papers, I, 238.

¹⁷James Graham to William A. Graham, Rutherfordton,
September 18, 1833, Graham Papers, I, 265.

¹⁸Hoffmann, Andrew Jackson, p. 56.

¹⁹Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

The foregoing chapters document the manner in which the Western Carolinian underwent a series of internal changes which resulted in the loss of its earlier prestige and influence. The "rousing influence" produced by its pro-nullification editorial stance invited competition from journals of more moderate views; the establishment of the Carolina Watchman was the result. The two papers engaged in bitter journalistic battle for a brief time, but later came to a point of temporary agreement on principles under the banner of the new Whig party.

Burton Craige sold the Western Carolinian to John Beard, Jr., in June, 1833, pleading "a desire to engage in other pursuits" ¹ Beard, like Craige, was a warm advocate of states' rights and nullification. He nevertheless devoted a great deal more editorial space to the matter of state reforms than had Craige. During Beard's tenure as proprietor of the Western Carolinian a large and diverse segment of North Carolina's citizens became dissatisfied with various policies of the Jackson Administration. This

loosely-arrayed group "drifted together" during 1834-35 to form the new Whig party. Beard had exhibited strong anti-Jackson sentiments as early as September, 1833,² and soon mounted a vitriolic attack upon Martin Van Buren.

The Carolina Watchman remained pro-Jackson until 1834, when it broke with the administration over the removal of government deposits from the United States Bank.³ By 1835 both papers were solidly within the Whig party ranks. From that time forward, both papers supported identical causes and were in fact virtually indistinguishable in editorial thrust. Lemuel Bingham sold his interest in the Yadkin and Catawba Journal in November, 1833, and departed the profession of journalism; by May, 1834, the paper was forced by lack of patronage to cease publication.⁴

In February, 1835, Beard sold his interest in the Western Carolinian to Dr. Ashbel Smith and Joseph Wade Hampton, who likewise opposed Jackson and Van Buren and supported states' rights. Neither was as vociferous in this support, however, as had been Craige or Beard. In disposing of the Western Carolinian, Beard intimated that the journal's financial condition was not healthy and that "the welfare of his family . . . can be more effectively attained elsewhere" ⁵ Ashbel Smith remained connected with the

paper for only one year and thereupon relinquished sole ownership to Hampton.⁶

During Hampton's tenure the paper abounded with appeals to subscribers to "settle their accounts." Financial stresses apparently prompted Hampton to abandon journalism, for in February, 1838, he became proprietor of the Catawba Springs resort in Lincoln County⁷ and shortly thereafter sold the Western Carolinian to Benjamin Austin and Charles Frederick Fisher, a nephew of Charles Fisher.⁸

In their first issue, Austin and Fisher pledged that the Western Carolinian "shall not contain as much political matter as heretofore. We shall endeavor to give a greater variety to its contents."⁹ During their tenure, the journal abandoned the Whig party and returned to the Democratic fold. Austin and Fisher gave lukewarm support to the unpopular Martin Van Buren and instead concentrated their efforts on a ceaseless attack upon the Whig candidate, William Henry Harrison of Ohio. Interestingly, even at this late date the old suspicions regarding the elder Charles Fisher's "control" of the Western Carolinian were still in evidence. Wade Hampton saw fit to issue a public denial of this lingering rumor after he had disposed of the journal,

noting that "insenuations [sic] of this kind have frequently been made"10

Benjamin Austin, like so many of his predecessors, remained with the paper for only eleven months and departed journalism entirely. Charles Frederick Fisher continued to own and operate the Western Carolinian until its publication terminated in 1844. Fisher was plagued with the same financial difficulties which had troubled his predecessors. In 1841 he closed the doors of his establishment and made a six month long trip to Texas on "personal business." Prior to his departure, he began a series of appeals to his subscribers for financial aid. The following remarks are typical:

Some of our "patrons" have not paid us the first "red cent" since we took possession of this paper three years ago, and a still larger number are indebted for two years. For the last year the majority owe us.¹¹

The Western Carolinian was not the only newspaper to be beset by financial problems. Most of the journals of the era were faced with the same difficulties. Nevertheless, it is important to note that its earlier arch-rival, the Carolina Watchman, flourished during these years and survived until 1890. It, like the Western Carolinian, changed its political affiliation several times during its existence. Unlike the Western Carolinian, however, it never

became tainted with a highly unpopular "ideology," nor was it ever accused of being "controlled" by any man or group of men. Furthermore, it experienced only three transfers of ownership in its entire fifty-eight-year history.¹²

In many ways, the Western Carolinian never recovered from its initial identification with the nullification philosophy. The paper consistently failed to regain the ground it lost in the early 1830's, and the ensuing decade witnessed a steady succession of short-term proprietors, none of whom was able to make the paper what it once was. Ironically, the paper might well have flourished in its uncompromising approach to the subject of states' rights had it postponed its ideological foray until later decades. But in the 1830's the notion of southern nationalism was still in its infancy and unionism was uppermost in the minds of North Carolinians.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER VI

¹Western Carolinian, June 10, 1833.

²"PUBLIC DEPOSITES," in Western Carolinian, September 30, 1833.

³McFarland, "North Carolina Newspapers," pp. 407-8.

⁴Ibid., p. 408.

⁵"TO THE PATRONS OF THE WESTERN CAROLINIAN," in Western Carolinian, February 28, 1835.

⁶Western Carolinian, February 20, 1836.

⁷Western Carolinian, February 2, 1838.

⁸"To the Patrons of the Western Carolinian," in Western Carolinian, June 15, 1838.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰"Letter from Jos. W. Hampton to Messrs. Austin and Fisher," in Western Carolinian, June 28, 1839.

¹¹"TO THE SUBSCRIBERS OF THE WESTERN CAROLINIAN," in Western Carolinian, June 11, 1841.

¹²Beulah Stewart Moore, "John Joseph Bruner, Editor," in A History of Rowan County, North Carolina, Containing Sketches of Prominent Families and Distinguished Men, ed. by Jethro Rumble (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Company, 1929), pp. 21-22.

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